

## ***Rain Gardens***

### **What Is A Rain Garden?**

A rain garden is a garden of native plants that soak up rain water as it flows across the lawn (and generally receives water channeled to it from a downspout). Rain gardens are landscaped areas planted to replace areas of a yard. Homeowner's do not need a large yard to plant a rain garden. A rain garden can be installed in smaller spaces too.

### **Why Are Rain Gardens Beneficial?**

Compared to a conventional lawn, rain gardens absorb about 30 percent more water. Preventing water runoff from entering the streets, helps keep fertilizers, animal waste, and other debris from entering the storm drains.

The materials entering the storm drains are channeled directly to the streams within our communities.

Rain gardens can also help reduce the chances of local flooding, reduce erosion, filter contaminants from rain water, and improve the life of the area where the storm drains enter the streams.

Rain gardens are beneficial to wildlife, improve the look and feel of a homeowner's property and help improve the local water quality (the fish and aquatic life downstream will thank you!).

### **Suggestions on How To Create A Rain Garden**

#### **Size, Design, and Location**

Determine the rain garden's size, design and location. The average rain garden can accommodate water runoff from a roof to be about 1/6 of the size of the roof. This can accommodate the downspout runoff in a garden that is six inches deep. If space allows, you could plan the size of the rain garden to be about 1/2 of the area of impervious surface located on the property (or half of the area of the driveway, home/roof, sidewalk, or patio).

#### **Preparation**

Do not install a rain garden in an area that is always wet, above a septic system, near a water supply or a well. Make sure the rain garden is more than 10 feet away from a building structure.

A rain garden can be anywhere from three to 12 inches in depth, depending on the slope of the yard. A flat area or one with a gentle slope can be three to five inches deep, whereas, eight to 10 inches works for an eight to 12 percent slope. Dig out the area to the desired depth as it is important to get the bottom of the rain garden as level as possible so runoff water will spread evenly throughout the garden.

#### **Planting**

The benefits of native plants include a better absorption of water, deeper root systems, tolerance to varying weather conditions, etc.

Make sure the plants meet sun/shade requirements and are spaced apart accordingly.

Water new plantings well following installation. Continue with 1/2 inch of water, twice weekly, unless enough rainfall occurs. Once plants have established root systems, adequate rainfall should provide sufficient moisture.

Gather friends and family to help install the rain garden!

#### **Maintenance**

Hand-picking weeds will help the plant growth in the first year or two.

Herbicides are not recommended for rain gardens. Be careful if applying herbicides to adjacent lawns.

Add around two inches of mulch to help establish the garden and to keep weeds down. Heavier mulches such as pine, straw, or wood are preferred.

In the spring, cut plants as needed to improve growth.

If standing water occurs longer than two days, that may hurt plants and may be a sign the rain garden is not functioning properly. A small hole may need to be dug to allow drainage. If this does not help, redigging and releveling a portion of the garden may help.